

Education

I am committed to making sure that every Kansas student has an opportunity to a quality education. The competitiveness of our state and our nation is directly related to the quality of our children's education from pre-K to college and beyond. We must increase the number of qualified teachers in classrooms and maintain a degree of flexibility for state and local school organizations to tailor education programs around the unique needs of Kansas students.

Part of preparing our children to be successful means providing teachers with the resources they need to effectively meet the needs of their students. Every child should have access to a safe class environment, highly-qualified teachers, appropriate school supplies, and the attention necessary to overcome a learning deficiency. Congress plays an important role in education, but must be careful not to pass federal mandates that restrict ingenuity, responsiveness, and development at the state and local levels. Since parents and teachers best know the educational needs of their children and students, Congress should allow local school districts to determine how to best use federal educational resources.

Congress is scheduled to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the primary source of federal aid to K-12 education, during this current 111th Congress. The goal of NCLB is to ensure that all students receive the best education available by applying direct accountability through standardized testing. Accountability is important to ensuring strong schools, but federal initiatives need to contain a degree of flexibility that allows states to operate for the good of their students within the standards of federal legislation. In 2001, I voted against passage of NCLB because it did not afford sufficient flexibility to Kansas schools. Prior to NCLB, Kansas was already testing students and evaluating school performance under its own standards. Education is a process that involves more than just preparing for and taking tests. As Kansas ranchers say, "If you want fat cattle, you need to feed them, not just weigh them." We must prepare students for the challenges of life, not just standardized tests.

I have traveled throughout Kansas visiting with parents, teachers, and administrators to determine their education priorities. Considering their suggestions, I introduced H.R. 2166, the Practicality in Education Act, in the 110th Congress. This bill would bring common-sense reform to NCLB. Additionally, I testified before the House Education and Labor Committee to ensure that other lawmakers understand the unique challenges faced by Kansas schools, teachers, and students.

As Congress considers the reauthorization of NCLB, I will work to see that the reforms proposed in the Practicality in Education Act are included so that NCLB is less burdensome and more workable for our Kansas students, parents, and educators. States must have the flexibility to select the standards that most accurately assess individual student progress in the classroom. A benchmark used in New York City will most likely not be the best way to accurately assess the progress of a student in Hays, Kansas. We need to modify the evaluation criteria for disabled students and students with limited English language capabilities to enable teachers to swiftly adjust to unique learning challenges. States need the authority to set licensing requirements and standards for their own teachers and education professionals. We need to relieve certain schools that are deemed "failing" under NCLB from facing broad, crippling sanctions for the failure of only a few students.